

...that the Bangladeshi government is facing widespread pressure to adopt a blasphemy law that carries the death penalty?

Since February 2013, the Bangladeshi government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has faced widespread pressure to adopt a blasphemy law that includes capital punishment for insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. The country recently has been experiencing widespread protests and violence associated with this call.

This pressure began in April, after four internet bloggers were arrested for “harming religious sentiments” in their postings on Bangladesh’s International War Crimes Tribunal. (Bangladesh, not the international community, established the tribunal to adjudicate alleged war crimes perpetrated in 1971 during Bangladesh’s war of independence from Pakistan.) They also blogged about the conviction and death sentence for a leading Jamaat-e-Islami leader, Delwar Hossain Sayeedi. Jamaat-e-Islami is the largest religious political party in Bangladesh that opposed partition from Pakistan.

Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies, including Hifazat-e-Islam, circulated calls across Bangladesh for a blasphemy law and held multiple rallies. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in an interview with BBC rejected that Bangladesh needed a blasphemy law. However, in the last month fervent support for such a law has increased.

On May 4th, more than a hundred thousand people attended a rally organized in Dhaka by Hifazat-e-Islam and demonstrated their support for the adoption of a blasphemy law which would include the death penalty. The rally sparked a violent confrontation between rally supporters and governmental security forces, resulting in the death of at least twenty people, injuries to dozens more and damage to buildings, cars and other property.

While the situation in Bangladesh remains uncertain, blasphemy laws inherently are problematic as they run counter to international human rights standards. As examples from around the world show, they empower governments, religious majority communities, and extremists to enforce particular religious views on individuals, minorities, and dissenters.

For more information on blasphemy cases in the world see the [Thematic Issues](#) chapter of USCIRF's 2013 Annual Report .